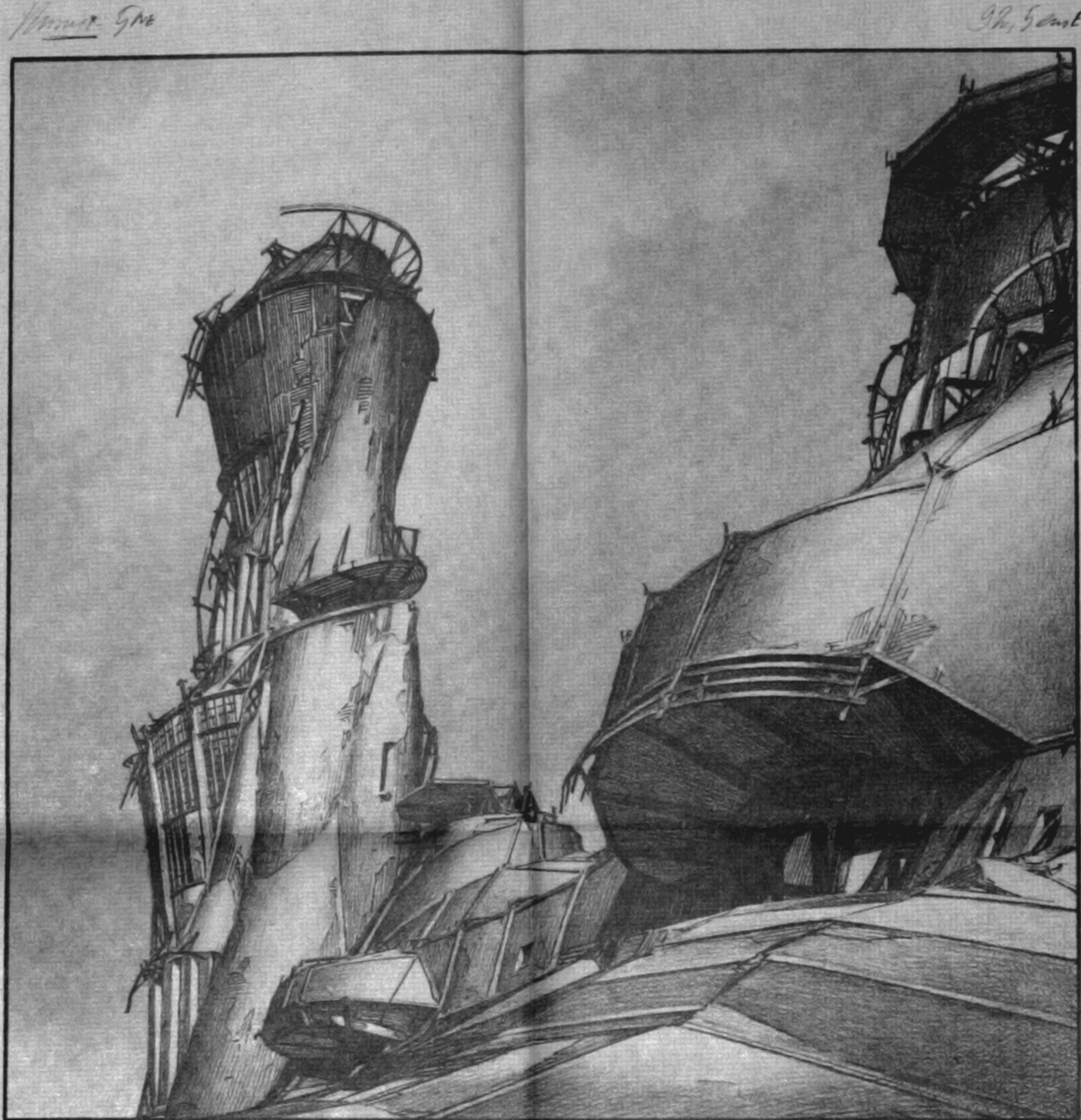


Centricity

The Unified Urban Field



Lebbeus Woods

February 18-March 19, 1988

Gallery Hours
Wed.-Sun. 12-6 PM

Opening Reception
February 18, 7-9 PM

Discussion Program

Critical Issues in Public Art and Public Architecture

#14 February 25

On the Question of Scale in Urban Design

Moderator: B. Aaron Parker

#15 March 8

Spirituality in Contemporary Public Art

Moderator: Hera

#16 March 15

Is Architecture the Only Form of Public Art?

Moderator: James Wines

All discussion begins 7PM, and \$2 contribution is requested.

STOREFRONT

for Art & Architecture

97 Kenmare Street (near Lafayette) New York, NY 10012 212-431-5795

A Not-For-Profit Organization funded in part by NYSCA and NEA. A Program of Cultural Council Foundation

Next Programs

Discussion Program

The following are the premises of each discussion. All discussion begins 7PM, and \$2 contribution is requested.

#14 February 25.

On the Question of Scale in Urban Design
Master planning parts of cities in a 'democratic environment' is unique to our time. How, and to what degree should it be done, if at all?
Moderator: **B. Aaron Parker**

#15 March 8.

Spirituality in Contemporary Public Art?
Spirit: 1. the principle of conscious life: the vital principal in man, animating the body or mediating between body and soul—*Random House Unabridged Dictionary*

In 1910 Kandinsky declared the "great epoch of the spiritual . . .". In 1914 Arthur Jerome Eddy wrote that, "It is only when new and strange forms are used because they are necessary to express a spiritual content that the result is a living work of art." Yet the use of the word spiritual was verboten in the late '30s and '40s, and according to Richard Pousette-Dart was "near-heresy and dangerous to an artist's career." Enter Alfred Barr, Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg and an emphasis on formalist criticism . . . art for art's sake . . . with its resultant pattern of taste which still surrounds us. Can we go beyond the acceptable and conventional to join Mondrian, Duchamp, Barnett Newman, Beuys, Irwin, Turrell, Maya Lin and the sculptors of the land: Heizer, Holt, Smithson and De Maria, to express our desire for spirituality through the arena of contemporary public sculpture?
Moderator: **Hera**

#16 March 15.

Is Architecture the Only Form of Public Art?
From all evidence available today, integration of the arts is a dead issue. The alternative is to accept architecture as the only true public art—not architecture as formalism, nor architecture as service space, nor architecture as style, but architecture as art. This formulation in itself demonstrates the awkwardness and self-consciousness of the situation. If architecture is seen as a natural and organic aesthetic exploration, then it automatically qualifies as art. To define it as art is simply to continue the separatism, but because the prevailing view is of architecture as design, there seems no other choice than to use the term "architecture as art." The reader must bear in mind the above apology and assume that, given some future resolution of these linguistic difficulties, the qualifying divisions will no longer be necessary.

Architecture is public art because it is by nature public. In every aspect of our conscious and unconscious existence architecture is the enclosure that both shelters and exposes the identity of the inhabitant. In psychology it provides a reference structure with a universal associative value. While architecture is clearly archetypal, it is not necessarily perceived as art. When we no longer have to categorize architecture as art, it will be art. And when it is art, it will be public art of the most convincing kind.
Moderator: **James Wines**



Exhibition

Centricity: The Unified Urban Field
February 18-March 19

Influence of scientific developments on architecture

The most imaginative intellects of the 20th century chose physics as their field of play. Games of light and chance. Episodes of inferences, relationships without certainty, effects without cause, interdependence of time and space, mysteries of matter thoroughly explored, but retained as mysteries. An epoch of conditional truths. In a sense the four hundred year history of modern science culminates and ends in these physics, having outrun its premises. A new epoch has opened, though few of us have reached its threshold.

Certainly modern architecture has not. Architecture more than ever clings to history and language for its origins. Visions of ethereal energies and exotic matter have not yet roused architects from their comfortable ruminations in the past. And let us not forget that language merely circumscribes what has been. Only perhaps when the rest of the world is utterly transformed by new understandings of its substance and dynamics will architecture be released from questionable certitudes of an imagined history.

History—Voltaire called it the lie commonly agreed upon. History is a fiction. It is necessary, but not unconditional, not true. It is useful, finally, practical, instrumental, but illusory as a tender song, sung by drunkards, illusory as an electron cloud hovering near the core of matter. Modern physics has no use for fictions disguised as fact, for a sacrosanct history. Today physics invents the instantaneous history of the Now. It closes in on an instant of being, touching but not seizing an essence of motion, of change, in flashes of light crossing infinite and infinitesimal space, at once. Can architecture exist so dangerously?

Physics is theory and experimentation, vision and construction. Apparatus exists only to verify the elegance of an ideal. Everywhere in nature, the same laws apply—so it says. Everywhere in nature, truth is only instantaneous—it is only Now. The machines physicists build—accelerators, interferometers, radio telescopes—are an architecture of the elusive instant, the ephemeral Now. Can architecture also certify mere being?

The influence of modern physics on architecture has hardly begun. Architecture is slow to receive the new, especially when it is dangerous—how much safer to dwell in an idyllic past circumscribed by walls of literature and poetry, music, painting and sculpture. Architecture, at its best today, seeks always the healing touch of art, the always warm Mother-embrace of art, which protects and comforts and saves us from the cold, relentless Father of science, threatening with the indifferent glance of eternity. Architecture as we knew it rightly fears the austere glance of objective vision, which would tear architecture from every consolation, every comfort, every protective domestic illusion that softens the dread of universal mortality.

When architecture finally feels the difficult and disturbing influence of modern physics, how will it be manifest? Immediately the thought comes up, like some terrible indigestion, of a Wellsian "Things to Come": the reign of the Airmen and the Engineers, conquest and technology, a millennial military-industrial civilization. But this is a fear-image, a shrinking back from the cruelly enlightening Father. Science may lead to technology, but it begins in understanding. The origin of science, and of an architecture of science, is an instinct to comprehend, to know the world comprehensively, and "without interest," as Schopenhauer said, without desires that bend knowledge to a limiting purpose.

The influence of physics on architecture, when it comes, will be more fundamental than the influence of technology. Tools increase human capacity by extending the senses and by adding mechanical strength to the inherited organic. Science changes the very ideas of what is natural and human, of what human capacity and strength really are.

The influence of Relativity, when it comes, will be to release social existence and its architecture from rigid boundaries and forms, to free thought and action from specious certitudes of both history and prediction. Uncertainty and probability are concepts from physics that will give the present moment supremacy in things conceptual and material. And they will revolutionize the meaning of these two words relative to each other. The visionary world of wave phenomena will become palpable, present and material.

Physics will affect architecture not by the notions of scientific methodology as they are commonly believed, but by the paradoxical synthesis of imagination and mathematics revealing the atom and cosmos. In fact, the changes to come are entirely synthetic in nature and method, to be supported by fragmentary analysis, but occurring in a realm beyond it. This is the realm of ordinary experience, the realm in which architecture can become the instrument and laboratory of a humanistic science whose outline and workings can today only be imagined.

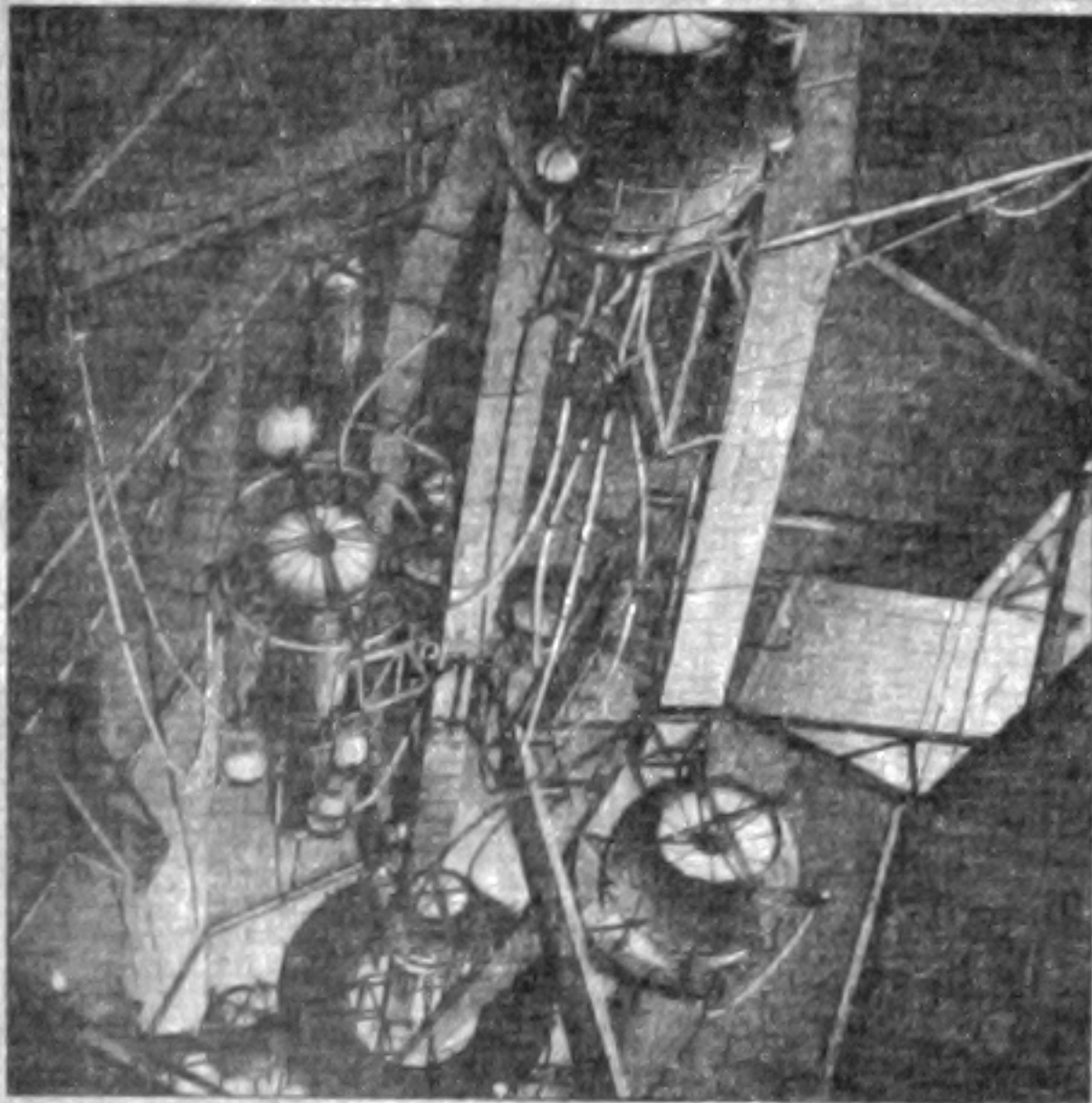
I would like to propose at least an image of this science, which I have called a universal science. It is an image of poised intensity, of great inward tensions held in dynamic equilibrium by even greater inner strengths. These are the strengths of knowledge, gained by a universal science practised on the fields of human experience. Knowledge of this order comes from the individual's command of primitive inner forces of being through successive transformations of experience. Freud spoke of sublimation. Even earlier, Schopenhauer raised to the highest an ideal of the Sublime. Beauty, he said, is the knowledge we gain through pleasure; the Sublime is more difficult, more cold and fearful, being the knowledge gained through common human suffering. A civilization of science and the sublime will create through command of every pain of being an architecture of indifference to consolation and comfort, an architecture of resistance to every domesticating fear, in order to turn its gaze fearlessly into the immense void of being.

Lebbeus Woods

The above essay was presented at STOREFRONT during Discussion Program #7, along with "The Philosophy of Impossibility" by Neil Denari, on December 7, 1987.

Future Exhibition/Project Program

Long thin yellow legs of architecture by Coop Himmelblau from Vienna (March 24-April 23, 88), **Destruction and Construction** by Kawamata from Tokyo (April 28-May 28, 88), **Project DMZ**, inviting artists and architects to propose programs and designs for public use of the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea before the Summer Olympic 88 (June 3-26, 88), **Peter Cook and Christine Hawley** from London (Sept. 88), **Steve Barry** from New York (Oct. 88), Benta Stokke from Oslo (Jan. 89), **Kaplan and Krueger** from New York (88/89), **Project Atlas**, exhibition of design proposals for the reuse of abandoned missile silos and scrapped missiles (89).



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